



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

February 6, 2023

The Honorable Carol McGuire
Chair
House Executive Departments and Administration
New Hampshire General Court
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 507

Dear Representative McGuire:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose HB 507, which allows unlicensed individuals to practice in the state of New Hampshire.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 1,000 ASHA members reside in New Hampshire.¹

Providing health care services to vulnerable populations without minimum provider education and training standards is irresponsible and potentially harmful. It is the responsibility of the state licensing agency to ensure that minimum health, safety, and welfare standards are maintained; however, HB 507 would eliminate consumer protection standards and remove the state's ability to provide such oversight. The only recourse for consumers injured by an unlicensed provider would be to bring suit in court, which is a difficult and costly process.

Regulatory Oversight Is Needed for Consumer Protection

Regulatory oversight legislated through licensure is the accepted practice for consumer protection. Regulatory boards, including audiology and speech-language pathology boards in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, consist of practitioners from the profession being regulated and consumers of the services provided by the regulated profession. The practitioners ensure that board decisions are soundly based on the technical and scientific knowledge required to practice, as applied to individual patient care situations. The public can rely on the expertise and wisdom of practicing professionals to ensure that those in practice are held to the high standards of the profession.

Autonomous Practice

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are autonomous professionals that work directly with clients, patients, and students making independent judgments regarding the assessment and treatment of an individual's communication disorder. Audiologists earn a clinical doctoral degree, complete over 1,800 hours of clinical training and must pass a national exam. SLPs are highly skilled professionals with a minimum of a master's degree in communication disorders, completion of a supervised clinical fellowship, and passage of a nationally standardized examination.

The independent practice of the professions is fully supported and regulated by state licensing entities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All licensing boards recognize and value the autonomous practice of audiologists and SLPs. Licensure is designed to protect consumers from harm by:

- helping consumers identify the differences between audiologists, SLPs, and other persons providing services (e.g., paraprofessionals, teachers, hearing aid dispensers);
- ensuring that only those with the appropriate qualifications and training can provide audiology and speech-language pathology services;
- deterring hiring or substitution of others who do not meet the identified criteria for professional practice;
- deterring unethical behavior from professionals and employers such as over/under utilization, misrepresentation, and fraud;
- increasing accessibility to and reimbursement from third party insurers;
- providing the necessary authority to intervene in cases of provider misconduct; and
- providing a venue for consumers and professionals to seek redress, including censure of individuals who have committed fraud or engaged in otherwise unethical behavior.

Licensure and ASHA Certification

Both licensure and ASHA certification help ensure the quality provision of audiology and speech-language pathology services. State licensure provides consumer protection and recourse against incompetent practitioners and/or those acting in an unethical manner so that they may be removed from practice. Only licensed professionals can bill Medicaid. Medicaid funds support a wide range of Medicaid related initiatives, including medically necessary educational services and health related service needs for Medicaid beneficiaries. Without licensed audiology and speech-language pathology practitioners, New Hampshire will experience significant Medicaid funding losses.

ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) is the fundamental standard among major health professions and the most widely recognized symbol of competency for audiologists (CCC-A) and SLPs (CCC-SLP). Individuals holding the CCCs are expected to abide by ASHA's Code of Ethics. While licensure is important to legally perform our work, certification is important for internal professional recognition and external accountability.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position on HB 507. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Susan Adams, ASHA's director of state legislative and regulatory affairs, at sadams@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP
2023 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *New Hampshire* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/new-hampshire-state-flyer.pdf>